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ABSTRACT

This digest provides an overview of forces, both internal and external, driving change on community college campuses. External agents of change are: (1) societal needs and expectations, which are shifting toward multicultural diversity; (2) international competition, requiring that workers be highly skilled in adapting to international cultures; (3) educational competition, urging community colleges to contend with the private education sector in providing workforce training; (4) technological developments and the need for students to gain technological literacy; (5) legislative action that alters educational policies and practices; and (6) funding, with trimmed budgets and decreased public investment in education at the same level. forces include (1) changing academic values, with an emphasis on outcomes-based learning; (2) faculty, and the increasing importance of their relationships with students; and (3) a curricular reform that values multiculturalism. Though change is inevitable, providing accessible, quality education remains the unified goal of all community colleges. (Contains 12 references.) (YKH)

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Digest

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Forces Motivating Institutional Reform

by Jennifer Agnes Yee

Orchestrating change is a key responsibility of community college leaders, who must respond to perennial calls for institutional reform. Community colleges feel the pressure to change from both external and internal sources. This Digest provides an overview of trends and issues driving change on community college campuses.

External Motivators

The desire for change within community colleges often results from trends beyond classroom walls and off campus grounds. Key sources of externally motivated reforms are:

Societal needs and expectations. Community colleges face increasing pressure to respond to shifting societal trends. For example, the Community College League of California expects its institutions to assist the state in addressing the challenges caused by the growing diverse population (1993b). Also, Parkland College in Illinois established a campus-wide action committee to respond to the changing demographics of its students, faculty, and staff (Harris & Kayes, 1995). In these diverse contexts, simply accommodating change is inadequate; community colleges are being asked to evolve. Most often, the expectation is for the institutions to become focal points in a network of social services (Lorenzo & Lecroy, 1994; Travis, 1995). The changing population also calls for increased multicultural awareness (Harris & Kayes, 1995) and an understanding that students are consumers who may seek post-secondary education from alternative sources (Community College League of California, 1993b). Workforce 2000, a study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Labor in 1987, predicted that the labor force would add more older workers, women, people of color, and immigrants. As a result, community college leaders have altered their institutions to serve as training grounds so students can learn how to interact with diverse peoples in the wider socio-economic context (Harris & Kayes, 1995).

International competition. Concomitant to these domestic changes, industrial globalization requires workers highly skilled in adapting to international cultures. Community colleges therefore should recognize their students as members of a global community who need to develop the social and labor skills necessary to work well with people of all backgrounds (Harris & Kayes, 1995).

Educational competition. Community colleges can further help to solve economic problems by ensuring all workers access to skills training or retraining (Community College League of California, 1993b). In this effort, community colleges face competition from the growing private education sector. To maintain a competitive edge, community colleges need to solidify their current funding base and establish new sources of income to ensure quality public education (Community College League of California, 1993b). Another approach is to revise curricula to meet students' future needs through "school-to-work" or "tech-prep" programs (Harris & Kayes, 1995).

Technological developments. Linked to economic and labor force pressures is the need for students to gain technological literacy. Community colleges that are flexible enough to incorporate the latest hardware and software will be better equipped to increase educational access, because technological developments are stimulating new ways of thinking about educational service delivery. "Electronic colleges" may provide "instruction and student services...24-hours-a-day at home, in the office and even in the car" (Community College League of California, 1993a, p. 5). Technology may also provide access to students who previously could not take courses because of schedule conflicts or geographic location. O'Banion (1997) proposes that an improved "learning college" may build its foundation on technology because technology is "ism-free" (i.e., racism, sexism, ageism). However, technology causes concern if its usage perpetuates classism and prevents access to students who cannot afford computers at home (Community College League of California, 1993a).

Legislative action. In some instances, reform is not voluntary but mandated. The state governments of Florida and New Jersey and several other states for example, have legislated the use of standardized tests to measure community colleges' performance and to provide data for accountability (Capoor & Morante, 1990; Florida State Postsecondary Education Planning Commission, 1995). The Community College League of California calls for establishing "postsecondary education as an inalienable right in California" (1993b). Such legislation would have enormous ramifications for all aspects of institutional planning and resource allocation.

Funding. Decreasing public investment in education at the state level can also stimulate reform efforts. As program development is placed on hold and budgets are trimmed, community college leaders have been forced to pursue new funding sources. Private development efforts, innovative financial aid solutions, and altered student fee structures are examples of measures undertaken to ensure quality public higher education (Community College League of California, 1996).

Internal Stimuli

From within the community college system, an agenda for reform emerges, often in response to external trends. Internally stimulated reforms involve **Changing academic values**. The values underlying teaching and learning need to be critically examined. New pedagogy is needed for teaching students how to successfully manage changing environments (Lorenzo & LeCroy, 1994). This emphasis on "outcomes-based learning" shifts the learning paradigm from being behaviorally-oriented to being developmentally-oriented (Shipley, 1995). That is, the goal is to move students from accomplishing discrete tasks to knowing how to accomplish those tasks. The former implies memorization and practice; the latter implies synthesis and analysis, two critical components of lifelong learning. Because of the fluidity of technological change, those who commit themselves to lifelong learning will adapt better to social and economic changes (Travis, 1995).

Faculty. While technology may provide major advances in access and educational delivery processes, faculty relations with students will still comprise a major component of the community college experience (Community College League of California, 1993a). Faculty will help to improve educational services by revising curricula and adopting new technologies (Community College League of California, 1993a). In another vein, limited resources may alter the faculty make-up. Tenure may be less available to full-time faculty, and colleges may opt to employ part-time faculty more often (Lorenzo & LeCroy, 1994).

Curricular reform. The curriculum conveys implicit values and institutional priorities. Valuing multiculturalism, community college practitioners have responded to changing student demographics by incorporating diverse literatures into their curricula and by acknowledging new research on students' learning styles (Harris & Kayes, 1993). The development of new technologies has also caused faculty to reexamine their educational delivery methods (Travis, 1995). Additionally, "tech-prep" and "school-to-work" movements have stimulated faculty to collaborate with high school faculties and to incorporate more skill-building into the curricula (Horan, 1995).

Conclusion

While this Digest highlights only a smattering of the ongoing pressures for reform, these forces illuminate the interrelated nature of the community college sector with the wider social, political and economic landscape. As institutions address these internally and externally stimulated pressures, questions regarding the community college mission will no doubt arise. Nevertheless, fostering a socially responsible citizenry through accessible, quality education still remains their unified goal.

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